

make it through another day by darlingargents

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Summary:

It's no wonder that the day after Nancy's officially a high school graduate, she packs up her car and drives to Chicago.

make it through another day

Author's Note:

- For [summerdayghost](#).

On the day Nancy graduates high school, she's seen more people die over the course of Hawkin's "adventures" than she can count. All of them violent. All of them far, far too long-lasting, even the ones that only lasted seconds. She can see them playing on the backs of her eyelids whenever she blinks, or tries to sleep. She's taken to sitting outside in the early hours of the morning, listening to music or doing anything she can to keep from closing her eyes.

Even if she could keep her mind off of the blood and misery she's seen for five goddamn minutes, everywhere she looks reminds her. The school, the stores, the forest.

It's no wonder that the day after she's officially a high school graduate, she packs up her car and drives to Chicago.

The drive is long, but she can almost feel her mind calming down as she leaves Hawkins in the dust behind her. She thinks maybe the days of adventure are behind her, and she's glad. She won't miss it.

If she never sees the look in someone's eyes as they realize they're about to be torn apart by demons again, she'll be happy. Happy for the rest of her life. Happy enough that she might someday be able to sleep without nightmares.

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She drifts, for the first week or so. Gets a motel room and offloads most of her stuff, and spends the new few days driving around and doing touristy things. She stands on the edge of the lake and feels almost infinite. It's not her first time in Chicago — she's gone with her family a few times before, business trips turned short vacations — but it feels different this time. Because she's alone, maybe. Or maybe because she's a completely different person now.

The lake doesn't have answers. She drives back to the motel and doesn't sleep until four in the morning.

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When she starts to feel restless, like her skin doesn't quite fit properly, she calls Jane on the phone in her motel room. Hopper answers the phone and seems surprised when she asks to speak to his daughter.

"Nancy?" Jane says, a little hesitant, once she's on the line.

"Hey," Nancy says, and stalls out. She's not really sure why she's calling Jane, of all people, except that she knows that Jane went to Chicago a few months before and met a girl like her. Nancy thinks that maybe whoever this girl is, she might understand why she can't close her eyes at night. "You were in Chicago, right? A few months ago? And you met... another girl like you?"

"Yes," Jane says. "My... my sister. Kali."

Sister. Right. Not blood — well, yes, blood, because if Nancy knows anything about those labs, she knows they share spilled blood. Not by parentage, then. "Do you know where to find her?"

"Why?"

It's a fair question. Nancy doesn't know the answer. Something inside her feels like it's calling out, maybe. She barely remembers making the choice to pick up the phone. "I don't know. I want to meet her."

Jane hesitates, but eventually gives Nancy an address. Nancy thanks her and hangs up. It's not late, maybe eight or nine, but she lies down on the cheap sheets and closes her eyes. The smell of antiseptic concealing mold is faint but clear.

A gunshot echoes in her mind, and she opens her eyes, but not before she sees a chunk of someone's head flying across a room, spraying gore and blood in every direction. Her hands are shaking.

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She walks into Kali's warehouse the next morning. It's massive and empty, the beams of light from the windows illuminating the dust motes in the air. There's nothing and no one there. Kali and her gang have moved on.

Nancy's at a loss for a moment, before she forces herself to be practical. She goes upstairs in the warehouse, and finds that it's empty too, but there's enough things left behind — a couch with blankets and pillows on it, fresh-ish food in the fridge, coats on the backs of chairs — that she thinks someone might be back at some point. So she gets a pen and her notebook from her bag and scrawls a short note. She folds it, writes FOR KALI on the outside, and tucks it half under the blanket on the back of the couch.

When she leaves, it's like there's something empty inside her.

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Two days later, the phone in Nancy's motel room rings just after midnight.

She's watching the news on the old, crackling TV, but she shuts it off and practically dives for the phone at the first ring. "Hello?" she says, her heart in her throat, because there's only one person who has this number — other than the motel itself, but they wouldn't be calling past midnight.

"How did you find my warehouse? How did you know who I was?" demands a woman on the other end of the line. "I have half a mind to find and kill you."

"Kali, right?" The silence speaks volumes. "Jane sent me," Nancy says. "I'm a friend." Oddly, the threat against her life doesn't bother her much. Kali has every reason to be suspicious.

"How do I know that?" Kali demands. "I read your note. I don't believe that Jane would tell you how to find me. Did you hurt her? Believe me, if you did, I *will* kill you. I know where you are."

Well, if she called the motel, she must know where Nancy is. That's fine. She can run if she really needs to. "I can give you Jane's

number. You don't have it, do you? You can call her and she can vouch for me."

Kali is silent for a long moment. "Tell me," she finally says. Nancy recites Hopper's number, and adds, "Jane might not answer the phone, just ask for her and say that Nancy gave you the number."

Kali hangs up without responding. Nancy hangs up the receiver, finding herself more cheerful than seems appropriate. Kali had been reactive and rude, but it's understandable — she has no reason at all to trust random strangers leaving her notes. Hopefully Jane can set her straight.

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Nancy ends up putting the news back on while she waits for Kali to call back. It's nearly one in the morning, and Nancy is considering giving up and going to sleep, when the phone rings again. She dives for it again, turning off the TV in the same motion. "Hello?"

"Nancy Wheeler," Kali says. "I suppose I believe you. The man — Jane's father — was not happy with being woken up."

"Whoops." She hadn't even thought of that. "Sorry. Did you talk to her?"

"Yes." Kali takes an audible breath. "I have to thank you. I didn't know if I'd ever talk to her again. I'm afraid I made mistakes when she was here with me, and I didn't know how to contact her, and I'm grateful that I now have a way of finding her."

"No problem. Did you consider what I said in my letter?"

"Ah, yes. You want to join my... my 'gang'?" Kali sounds very amused, and Nancy finds herself blushing a little.

"I guess, yeah," she says. "I mean. I'm in Chicago, I don't know anyone, and I don't want to remember what happened in Hawkins, but I don't want to be around people who don't get it, you know?"

"I know what you mean," Kali says, sounding a little more serious. "After I left the lab, I realized I didn't fit in with most people. I wasn't

normal. So I found people who I fit with. They hadn't been through what I had, but they understood." She pauses. "I think you understand too, Nancy."

"I think so," Nancy says quietly.

"I'm not going to say you can join us, not immediately. But we can meet tomorrow. And we'll see." Kali lists off an address and time that Nancy writes down before she can forget, and says they'll talk then.

When Nancy hangs up and lies down, she finds that, instead of seeing terror behind her eyes, she imagines what Kali's smile might look like.

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The address Kali gave her is a dilapidated warehouse that looks more condemned than fit for human residence. Having checked out of the motel already, Nancy finds herself considering if she *really* wants to live somewhere like this, before a van pulls up and a young woman gets out.

"Nancy?" the woman says, approaching Nancy where she's leaning against the door of her car. Nancy straightens up and nods. The woman's voice is incredibly familiar.

"Kali?"

Kali smiles, and oh, it's more beautiful than Nancy could have ever imagined. "Yes. It's good to meet you."

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Kali gives Nancy the real address, and they meet there fifteen minutes later. It's still a warehouse, but it looks a lot nicer, and the inside is similar to where Nancy first went, with less dust. There's a spare bedroom with a mattress on the floor and not much else. Nancy doesn't even think of complaining.

The other members of Kali's gang are around and say hello briefly before going back to whatever else they were doing before. It's just Kali and Nancy up in the bedroom when Nancy pulls out the sheets

she packed from home and starts to make the mattress into a bed.

“You’ve seen things, in Hawkins?” Kali asks, from where she’s sitting against the wall. There’s a snake weaving between her fingers, purple and gold, sparkling. “Bad things, that made you want to leave?”

Nancy watches the path of the snake for a moment. Jane had described Kali’s abilities, but seeing it in person — it’s incredible. “Yes. There’s a lot of bad happening there. It was... it was too much.”

“Lots of bad here too.” The snake fades away and a flower, too big and bright to be real, appears between her fingers.

“Maybe. But I didn’t grow up here. I don’t know anyone here, which means that there isn’t going to be anyone else I’ve known since elementary school who dies in front of me.”

The flower vanishes too, and Kali is looking at Nancy with sympathy. Nancy pulls the sheets tight and digs in the bag for her duvet, not looking. She doesn’t need sympathy. She’s alive. “I can’t promise you won’t see anyone die,” Kali says. “But I think it’ll be good for you here.”

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Nancy cuts her hair, short enough that it curls around her chin, and ends up dying it black. When she looks in the mirror, she sees someone different, and it’s almost enough distance to make her feel separate from who she was in Hawkins.

She drifts. She moves into the warehouse, makes the room she’s been given hers — adds polaroids on the walls, a stand up mirror, a dresser to store her things. Kali lends her eyeliner and she adds glitter to it, and she looks different but still feels like herself.

Some days, she finds herself wondering what Kali would do if she kissed her.

She’s thought of girls that way before, but it’s never been more than a drifting thought before now. A minor crush. But this feels like more. She thinks about it whenever she sees Kali, sees her lighting flames and fireworks on her fingers or doing her makeup or walking down

the street. She wants to pull her close and lick the taste of ashes off her mouth, wants to see every part of her skin and her soul.

She imagines her hands, with their chipped black nails, on Kali's skin. She thinks about it all the time.

*

She still has nightmares, though not every night. Still wakes up with the image of someone's head being blown to pieces, or worse. Some memories, some fears. She doesn't wake up screaming, but she wakes up in a cold sweat and lunges for the light, to remind herself that she's here, that it's real, that nothing bad is happening right then.

After the first couple of weeks of this happening, she wakes up one night and can't stay in the room. The polaroids on the walls, her and Barb and Steve and Jonathan and the kids — they're too much. She can't look at them. She pulls on a sweater and leaves, going down to the ground floor, expecting no one to be awake. The fire is out, and it's dark as she makes her way down the stairs.

She doesn't expect anyone, but somehow it's not surprising that Kali is in the middle of the room, sitting on the cement floor, surrounded by butterflies. Dozens and dozens of them surround her, glowing in different colours. Purple, blue, pink, green, yellow. They flutter around her, and as Nancy watches, she closes her eyes in concentration and another butterfly, its wings glowing orange, flies up out of her hand.

Nancy doesn't want to break the moment, but one of the stairs creaks as she steps on it, and Kali opens her eyes. The butterflies vanish, and Nancy can feel the loss instantly. The room is dimmer, and feels more like a dusty warehouse instead of a room full of possibility.

"Couldn't sleep?" Kali asks.

Nancy doesn't answer; the fact that she's here says enough, she thinks. She sits down on the cold floor opposite Kali. There's a small camping lamp on the floor giving light, and Nancy can see it reflected in Kali's eyes. Like dark mirrors with a burst of light in the middle.

Kali makes a motion with her fingers, and a small bird lands on Nancy's knee. Its wings glow in the dark, a pale green, and when she holds out her hand, it lands on her wrist, tapping its sharp beak against her hand.

The bird's eyes look almost intelligent. Nancy finds herself feeling a little better. "Thanks," she says quietly, not letting the moment break.

"It's what I do," Kali says, and the bird flutters away. "I'm going to bed."

She stands and offers Nancy a hand up, and they walk back upstairs. The door to Nancy's room is right by the stairs, and she's about to go in when Kali stops her. "Are you having nightmares?"

"Some," Nancy says.

Kali looks almost nervous, which is not a look that Nancy has ever associated with her. "My bed is pretty big. If it'll help. If it won't—"

"Yes," Nancy finds herself saying before she can think it through. It's probably a bad idea to sleep in the same bed with the girl she's found herself constantly wanting to kiss, but if it makes the nightmares stop or at least fade out faster, it'll be worth it.

Kali's bed is bigger than hers, though not big enough that they can comfortably sleep without touching each other. Nancy tries to keep on her side, but after a few minutes of tense silence Kali lets out a sigh and flops over, pulling Nancy closer.

"I won't bite," she says, and it startles a laugh out of Nancy. She rolls over onto her side, facing Kali. The window over the bed faces some streetlights, and there are faint stripes of light across the room. One of them is partly over Kali's face.

Nancy finds herself staring at the outline of Kali's lips, where the light is just barely illuminating the shape. Without consciously choosing it, her hand lifts and brushes against Kali's cheek. It's warm, and her skin is so, so soft.

"Nancy," Kali says, quietly, almost like a prayer. Nancy throws caution to the wind and kisses her.

It's messy, with too much teeth and desperation, but it makes something light up in Nancy's soul. It makes her feel alive, and it makes her feel fearless. She slides her hand around Kali's back and under her shirt, pulling her closer, feeling the ridges of Kali's spine under her fingers. Kali lets out a soft gasp against Nancy's mouth and she pulls away, staring.

Kali's pupils are blown wide, her lips reddened from Nancy's mouth. "Have you ever done this before?" Kali whispers.

"Not with a girl," Nancy says, feeling bolder than she thought she would. "But I want to. If you want to."

Kali doesn't respond with words. She doesn't need to.

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Nancy wakes up when the sunlight hits her eyes, feeling warmer and safer than she can remember feeling for a long time. It's almost overpowering; she sits up and rubs her eyes as the memories from the night before click together.

They didn't have sex. It was the middle of the night and they were both exhausted. But Nancy's lips still feel almost bruised from kissing, and she wants more, and she knows Kali does, too. Whatever this is, it's new and precious and wonderful, and she wants it, for as long as she can have it.

She closes her eyes. The gunshots are distant, faded. Not gone, and they probably never will be.

But as Kali sleepily pulls her closer, she thinks that for now, it's enough.